

Psalm 29 - Peace in the storm

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[0 : 00] Psalm 29.

The voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars. The Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon leap like a calf, Siron like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the Lord shakes the desert. The Lord shakes the desert of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forest bare. And in his temple all cry glory. The Lord sits enthroned over the flood. The Lord is enthroned as king forever.

The Lord gives strength to his people. The Lord blesses his people with peace. Amen. Thank you, Steve.

[1 : 23] Before we get stuck in, let me pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for your word and your voice. We pray that your spirit would be with us today, giving us the ears to hear, the minds to understand, and the hearts to accept your fruit.

In Jesus' name, amen. So this psalm is all about a powerful storm. God in his humour has sent us a typical, dreary London grey day, so we're going to need to use our imaginations to imagine this powerful storm.

Have you ever been in a powerful storm? You know, the sort of one that shakes your house? This psalm talks about the image of God's voice as a powerful storm.

We see the thunder. We see the lightning. We see the flood. Let me bring this imagery to life with an example from Jesus' life. Keep one finger in Psalm 29 and flick forwards to page 1006, Mark chapter 4, verses 35 to 41.

It's perhaps a familiar story of a storm in the Bible. But put yourselves in the shoes of the disciples. Jesus had been teaching large crowds of people by the edge of the lake.

[2 : 46] And now he says in verse 35, let's go to the other side of the lake. And so, in verse 36, leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was in the boat.

There were also other boats with him. This event didn't happen in secret. There were eyewitnesses on the boat who saw what happened. Imagine you're on the lake. It's evening, so it's probably already dark.

But it just starts to get a bit darker as the clouds draw in. Now this lake, by the way, is 13 miles by 8 miles. So it's a big lake. It's more like a sea.

And you're a long way out. And then, the wind starts picking up. You can just hear the wind whistling through the boat.

And the waves against the sides of the boat. And you're starting to get worried. You go on for a few more minutes. And it gets even darker.

[3 : 47] It's almost pitch black. Now this is no joke. Several of Jesus' disciples were professional fishermen. They knew what it was like to be out on sea. They were scared.

And they don't get scared for nothing. They knew that this was serious. And then the thunder starts. The wind gets louder. And the waves start coming up the side of the boat.

The waves come crashing into the boat. The water is coming into the boat. And it's almost swamped. It's a life and death situation. But Jesus is sleeping on a cushion.

The disciples are desperate. They're terrified. They wake Jesus and say, don't you care if we drown? Jesus gets up, rebukes the wind, and says to the waves, quiet!

Be still. Then the wind died down. And it was completely calm. Verse 40, Jesus says to his disciples, why are you so afraid?

[4 : 46] Do you still have no faith? Verse 41, they were terrified. At first they were terrified of the storm. But now they're terrified of Jesus.

They ask each other, who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him. This psalm is about exactly that.

You see, the disciples started by fearing the storm itself. And it must have been quite the storm to get the disciples terrified. But they ended by fearing the one who commands the wind and the waves.

Come back with me to Psalm 29, and let's get stuck in on page 558. Firstly, we're called to ascribe glory to the Lord. This psalm begins with three calls to ascribe glory to the Lord.

Have a look down at verses 1 and 2. Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name.

[5 : 47] That word ascribe means to give the credit for something to someone. You see, the trap that we and the disciples fall into sometimes when we see something amazing like a powerful storm or a sunset or a beautiful landscape is to say, isn't nature wonderful?

Wasn't that storm so powerful? And in some ways that's factually true. But we forget the one who sent the storm or who painted that landscape. It's not just that God created the world and is letting it run its course like some epic domino run.

But no, we know that Jesus is intimately involved in everything that we see and in everything that happens. In him, all things hold together. So it's right that we ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name.

So much so that the psalmist repeats that instruction three times. And when we see something repeated in the Bible three times, we've got to pay attention to it. We've got to look at it. Verse 1 calls to the heavenly beings or the mighty ones.

That's a reference to angels. But we know from other psalms that it's just as much of an instruction to us here today. Spurgeon says that the reason this is repeated three times is because, in his words, we are backward in glorifying God.

[7 : 04] And especially great people who are often too much swollen in their own glory to spare time to give God his rightful praise. When was the last time you ascribed glory and strength to the Lord?

If you do find yourself in the midst of a powerful storm, do you ascribe glory and strength to the Lord? When you see the London weather go from rain to hail to sunshine in the space of 15 minutes, do you ascribe glory and strength to the Lord?

What about when your prayers are answered? Do you take the credit? Or will you ascribe glory and strength to the Lord? And what's the right way of doing that?

Well, it's in the second half of verse 2. It says to worship the Lord in the splendour of his holiness. This word, worship, means to bow low in loving submission.

Worshipping the Lord is all about making more of him and less of us, of delighting in his splendour and not our own. So let us ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name.

[8 : 09] The next verses all centre on the voice of the Lord, which we hear seven times as it comes in judgment through the storm against his enemies. We see in these verses just how almighty and powerful the voice of the Lord is, and it's right to fear it.

It's interesting that we see the strength and power of God through his voice. I think that's because his voice is unlike our voices. When we say that we'll do something, it may or may not happen.

But when God says something, it does happen. And that's part of what makes his voice so almighty. Have a look down at verse 3. We see that the voice of the Lord is over the waters.

The God of glory thunders. The Lord thunders over the mighty waters. The focus here is on the waters. And there are clear echoes here of God's voice in Genesis 1, with the Spirit of God hovering over the waters.

In Genesis 1, God's voice creates everything out of nothingness. God spoke and everything we see and hear and touch was created. Not only that, but the voice of the Lord is the cause of this storm, just as it was the cause of the storm in Mark's Gospel.

[9 : 28] The glory of God thunders. The Lord thunders over the mighty waters. Verse 4 goes on to say, The voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord is majestic.

The voice of the Lord isn't just creative and loud, but it's powerful. Powerful in judgment. And even more powerful in salvation. And more than that, it's majestic.

I don't know how many of you heard clips of King Charles III when he was in the US. His words somehow, partly because he was king, partly because those words were carefully chosen, they managed to unite both Democrats and Republicans in standing ovation, which is not something that many people can do.

So in some ways, you could say that his voice was full of majesty. But the Lord Jesus Christ is king over all. And his voice is full of even more majesty than that.

His voice is not about diplomacy and trying to get people to agree with each other. But his voice is full of the truth and grace that we all desperately need to hear.

[10:39] Verse 5 goes on to talk about the cedars. It says, The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars. The Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. Now, you might not know me very well, but I am actually a bit of a nerd.

And have been known to read books about trees. And one of the amazing things about trees is that living wood is an amazing material. And it's able to withstand storms and rain like no other material. Build a tree out of metal and the branches will collapse under their own weight if they don't rust first. Build it out of plastic and they'll snap. And the cedars of Lebanon were even more impressive than that.

They were trees that grew up to 30 to 40 meters tall, with trunks that were 10 meters in diameter. And they lived for thousands of years because of their strength and their ability to withstand everything that was thrown at them.

And yet, they are no match for the voice of the Lord. They are broken into pieces by the Lord. The cedars of Lebanon are used throughout the Old Testament to refer to people, sometimes positively, but often as a representation of a proud and rebellious people.

[11:57] And that's what the psalmist is doing here. These proud and rebellious people come in their own strength against God and God breaks them in judgment.

That's a great comfort to us, isn't it? When we see powerful opposition to the church, when we see leaders in this world who are unjust, or when we ourselves face injustice, to know that God is going to come in judgment against those people.

And we were looking at that a bit this morning, weren't we, in Romans 12. But actually, if I think about it, I used to be like one of these cedars. When I went to university to study natural sciences, I used to be a proud individual.

My pride came from thinking that I could figure out the answers, and actually the answers were to be found in science. And that spiritual matters of all kinds were outdated and irrelevant.

Morally, I knew that I wasn't perfect, but I wasn't that bad. You know, I tried to keep the rules, and I probably did that better than most people. But just as the storm of God's voice exposed the weaknesses in these proud cedars and broke them to pieces, the Holy Spirit revealed to me all of my sins and flaws, and that I too was a sinner in need of grace.

[13:15] My eyes were opened to see that science, while it might explain how the world works, can never explain why the world was. And through his word, God revealed to me the truth of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, and how that was the hope I needed.

Being humbled and broken in this way, I accepted Jesus' offer of forgiveness. And that offer of forgiveness is here for us today. Don't stay a proud cedar.

If you rely on your own strength, then in the time of judgment, God's voice will break. If you're already a believer here today, don't let that pride and self-reliance creep back in.

It has a way of doing that, doesn't it? Give everything over to the sustainer of the universe, and trust in his plan for your life. Verse 6 goes on to say, He makes Lebanon leap like a calf, Syrian like a wild ox.

You see, God's voice doesn't just influence individual cedar trees, but whole civilizations like Lebanon, or whole landscapes like Syrian or Mount Hebron. They're like wheat calves or young oxes in comparison with the strength of his voice.

[14:31] Verse 7 says, The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning. Verse 8, The voice of the Lord shakes the desert. The Lord shakes the desert of Kadesh.

This desert or wilderness is meant to conjure up images of a terrifying and vast landscape. Yet the Lord shakes up even this vast landscape. The desert is not an easy place for humans to live. There are many snares and dangers, whether it's the heat of the day or the cold of the night, whether the sandstorms or the snakes, whether the difficulty to navigate through the shifting dunes, the size of the sheer place, and the lack of water.

All of those things are dangers of the desert. And in some ways, we as Christians live in a wilderness today. There are many snares and dangers in the world out there that are looking to draw us away from Jesus while we await the perfect new creation.

But even in this time, God has the power to shake those snares and dangers off us. Verse 9, The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forest bare, and in his temple all cry glory.

[15:45] Again, we see the power of God's storm to twist the oaks and strip the forest bare. There is no hiding from God's judgment. And so why do we hide our sins from him? We should confess them all to him, even our darkest sins, and let the Spirit work in us to transform us.

Having heard how almighty the voice of the Lord is and how it's overcome his enemies, there is nothing to do in his temple but to cry glory. We've seen that the voice of the Lord is almighty, and verses 10 and 11 leave us with a warning and a promise.

We see the warning of judgment in verse 10. Have a look at what it says. The Lord sits enthroned over the flood. The Lord is enthroned as king forever.

The word for flood that's used here is the same that was used in the flood of Noah. In that time, God saw that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all of the time.

It's one of the most depressing verses in the Bible, isn't it? And so in judgment, God sent a flood to judge the earth. On the last day when Jesus returns, there will be another judgment to come.

[17:05] But there's a choice now. Having seen the power in God's voice, do you want to stand like a tall, proud cedar and take your chances against the storm of the Lord's judgment, or do you accept his offer of forgiveness?

Verse 11 has an amazing promise on the other hand, and it's the promise of strength and peace. Have a look at what it says. The Lord gives strength to his people. The Lord blesses his people with peace.

At first reading, it's strange how the ferocity of the storm that we've been thinking about is finished with peace and strength rather than dismay and destruction.

How does this work? How can a God who brings a storm with his almighty voice also bring strength and peace? It seems impossible, doesn't it? But the key to unlocking this mystery is Jesus.

You see, God isn't just a distant God, but he is our loving God. And he's ours, not because of what we've done or because of who we are, but because of what Jesus achieved for us on the cross.

[18:13] At the cross, accompanied with darkness and an earthquake, Jesus bore the storm of God's judgment so that we wouldn't have to. He has paid the price that our sins deserve, earning forgiveness for us.

And we also know that Jesus didn't stay dead. He came back from the dead on that glorious Easter morning. And so in bringing us back into relationship with him and in conquering sin and death, the Lord gives us strength and peace.

Here on earth, we need strength. There are challenges and trials and storms that we will face into and they will not be easy. But God in his mercy gives us strength to face those challenges and storms.

We know that one day he will overcome them. And we know that we're not alone in facing them, but we have God with us every step of the way. Jesus is in the boat of those storms with us.

And if God is for us, then who can be against us? And more than that, we know that the wind and the waves of the storms that we face are in the hands of the one who loves us and who saves us.

[19:23] As hard as any storm is in the present moment, looking back, I can see how God was using those hard situations to strengthen me and strengthen my faith. And that's what he does with those storms.

God also brings peace to his people. Just as Jesus is sleeping in the midst of the storm, trusting in the sovereign plan of the Father, we too can rest and not be afraid in the storms of this life.

The peace of God is something that the world just cannot offer. Jesus has conquered sin and death and so now we can have ultimate peace as the children of God. As we come to our time of communion shortly, let us reflect on the storm that was heading our way and that we've now been saved from.

Jesus promises peace. In John chapter 14, he says to his disciples, Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Rest assured in this supernatural and sure peace from God, regardless of what the world has to throw at you. and let us confidently join in the song in shouting aloud that it is well with my soul.

[20:39] The next time you're in a storm, literal or figurative, bring this psalm to mind and rejoice in all the ways in which God has triumphed. Worship him and ascribe him the glory that is due to him.

Yes, because his almighty voice is unimaginably powerful, but more than that because the Lord Jesus Christ brings peace and strength to those he loves.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the power of your almighty voice and all that it has done for us.

Thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who brings us strength and peace through his death on the cross. help us to see you at work in the world around us and in our lives and help us to ascribe you all the glory that is due to your name.

In Jesus' name, Amen.